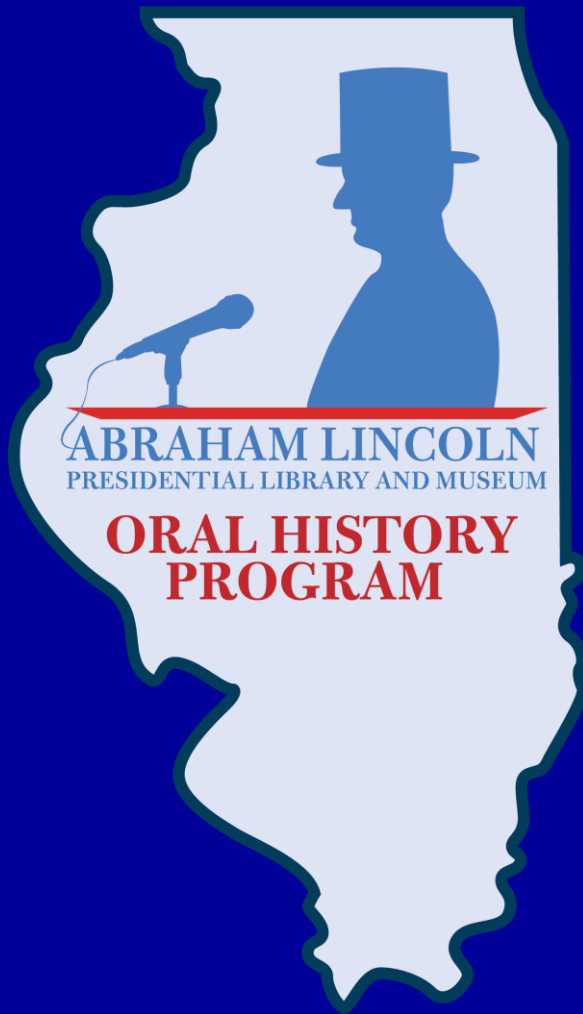



*Abraham Lincoln  
Presidential Library*



**Doing  
Oral History  
interviews**

Dr. Mark DePue  
Director of Oral History, ALPL

# Keys to Doing a Good Interview

- Have a passion for your subject
- Do a pre-interview
- Do your homework
  - Develop an outline
  - Know your equipment
- During the interview:
  - Start with introduction & use your outline
  - Listen  Follow-up questions



# The Three P's

- Preparation

**Prepare the Narrator**

- Preparation

**Prepare Yourself**

- Preparation

**Prepare Equipment**

# Preparing the Interviewee

- Choose your interviewee
- Conduct Pre-interview:
  1. Have them fill out biographical data form
  2. Learn about your interviewee ... BUT avoid a detailed discussion
  3. Take notes!
    - ✓ Does interviewee have photos, letters, etc?
  4. Explain the interview process
  - 5. Determine Time & Place for the interview**

# Preparing Yourself

- Do your background research.
  - Learn about your subject!
  - Background reading
    - Ask your teacher for suggested readings
  - Review documents from Interviewee
    - Photos, maps, documents, etc.
  - Develop the outline!

# Developing the Outline

- Start with the Outline Template provided
  - *Family Memories* or *Veterans Remember*
- Revise the template so it works for your interview
- Use the Outline as a Guide – **Not a Crutch**
  - A good outline and knowledge of the subject allows you to listen closely and ask the right follow-up questions.

# Prepare the Equipment

- Audio or Video?
- Audio: Minimal needs for equipment.
  - Find the right location – avoid distractions & interruptions
- Video: You will need an assistant
  - Are you on or off camera?
  - Finding the location.
  - Lighting
  - Clothing



# Choosing your Recorder

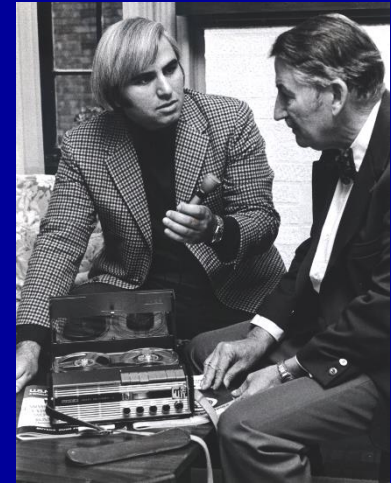
- Phone
  - Convenient
  - Lower quality
- Zoom H1
  - Easy to use
  - Good investment for those interested in future recordings
- Practice





# The Interview

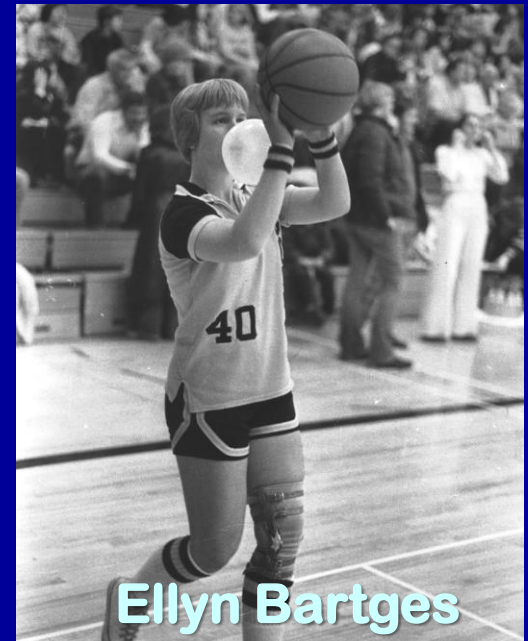
- Start with an introduction
  - Who you are.
  - Date & place of the interview.
  - Who you are interviewing.
  - Why the interview is being conducted.



# Interview Criteria, Cont

- Who—What—When—Where—How & Why
- Ask one question at a time
- Don't ask leading questions
- Moderate Tempo & Pauses
- Active Listening
  - Stay focused on the narrator, not on your next question!
  - Ask follow-on questions
- Don't interrupt!

**5 second  
rule**



**Ellyn Bartges**

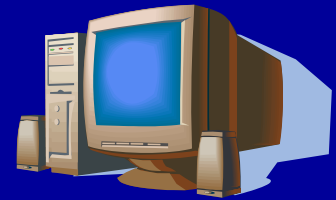
# Interview Criteria, Cont

- Historical Cues
  - Props are helpful
    - Photos & maps
    - Cherished possession
- Non-Verbal Empathy
  - Keep eye contact
- Reflective Questions
- **Stay impartial**
- **Check out the examples**



# After the Interview

- Get the interviewee's permission to use the interview.
  - Deed of Gift
- What will you do with the interview?
- Preserving the interview
  - Downloading? Transcribing?
  - A copy to the interviewee?
  - Archiving?





# Want to learn more?

- Books

- Don Ritchie's *Doing Oral History*
- Linda Wood's *Oral History Projects in your Classroom*

- Oral History Association's listing of
- “Principles and Best Practices”
- document at [/www.oralhistory.org/](http://www.oralhistory.org/)

